NOTES FROM THE:

Financial Information Systems Program Office

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FIRST Program Selects a Contractor

The FIRST program is currently underway with a source selection at Wright-Patterson AFB to select an application developer to build and field this program designed to modernize the Air Force Budget process. The goal of any program manager is to get his project completed with the least amount of expenditure of time and resources. The acquisition reforms that are unfolding are enabling the government program manager to reduce the time it takes to make a selection decision and reduce the resources required to make it. The combination of new methodologies for conduct of the source selection combined with the innovative use of computer technology will allow the program office to make more effective use of the resources that it has at its disposal. The result is a more cost-effective way to acquire goods and services for the government.

The implementation of acquisition reform has proven that the government can shorten the time to award of even the most complex acquisitions. Some of the significant changes to source selection methodology include Multi-step advisory source selections, paperless transmission of acquisition documents, and oral proposals. These changes have given the program manager tools that he may use to shorten the time to award during the source selection process. The FIRST program will utilize all the methodologies listed above in the source selection process.

The FIRST program is taking advantage of the Multi-step advisory process now allowed by the Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) to conduct the source selection. This means the receipt of proposal documentation from the prospective vendors will arrive at staggered points during the process. The past performance information will come in first, then the written proposals, and finally the cost proposal. The staggered submission allows the SPO to continually guide the vendors to a position which insures the Government will get proposals that truly reflect the needs of the program. As part of the process, the FAR now recognizes that use of oral presentations as a substitute for portions of a proposal can be effective in streamlining the source selection process. The FAR part 15 rewrite gives the program manager a tool that he can use to great benefit when looking for ways to shorten the time it takes to get to award. Oral presentations by offerors as requested by the Government may substitute for, or augment, written information. Oral presentations may occur at any time in the acquisition process, however the most useful period is during the proposal evaluation process. The aim of the process is to ensure the government understands the vendors' proposals and to minimize the written discussions that require so much time to go through. This has the potential for great savings in the time it takes to get to award. The parts of the proposal process most considered for oral presentation are the mission capability proposal which includes the technical and management aspects of the vendor's proposal. The FIRST program is poised to evaluate vendor proposals in accordance with these new methodologies.

Perhaps the biggest time thief in the pre-network era of source selections was the process of mailing acquisition documents to interested vendors. A program office had to maintain a mailing list of interested vendors and compile and print any changes to or updates of the acquisition documentation, prepare the copies for mailing, mail and await confirmation of receipt before time periods could start. This required a large administrative staff and added many days and weeks to selection process. The availability of the World Wide Web now allows program offices to ensure the availability of acquisition documents up to and including the Request for Proposal itself by requiring companies to download them from the program's web site. Vendors must be advised that all transmission of acquisition documentation will be via the web from the outset to control expectations. The FIRST program uses the Hanscom Electronic RFP Bulletin Board as its repository for all acquisition documentation. The URL for the FIRST program is http://herbb.hanscom.af.mil/info.asp?rfp=R08 for anyone interested in seeing this process at work.

Finally, the FAR part 15 rewrite supports more open exchanges between the Government and industry, allowing industry to better understand the requirement and the Government to better understand industry proposals. The purpose of these discussions is to further the understanding of the vendor community of the program requirements and the acquisition process. The caution that program managers must heed is to make sure that any new information is communicated to all

interested vendors. The way to do this is by keeping track of the content of these discussions and continually updating the web site discussed earlier. The benefit of these discussions is the program office can take advantage of the ideas brought to the table by the vendors who come in. The First program has posted questions presented to the SPO on the HERBB site to ensure that all interested parties have the benefit of the information.

The FIRST Program Office is committed to providing the best support to the functional community, all the resource advisors and budget officers in the Air Force, and by using the methods mentioned in this article we hope to give that support at the lowest possible cost.